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ABSTRACT

There are several barriers to increasing the number of black graduate students in the universities. The first impediment is the loss of overall graduate student support which will be sharply felt beginning in the fall of 1971. The Nixon Administration's program places a heavy emphasis on loans and persons from low income families are often reluctant to add to their debts accumulated from their undergraduate years. Another problem is that a relatively small number of black graduates apply to graduate school; many are siphoned off into industrial and business careers after graduation. A third barrier is the fact that black applicants tend to concentrate in a small number of fields: generally the humanities and social sciences, with almost no applications in the engineering field. Given these factors, the criteria used for admissions must be examined. The validity of the usual predictors varies widely across different areas of study, and motivation may be more important than undergraduate grade point average. (AF)

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Opening Address at

The Conference on the Recruiting of Black Graduate Students

(Held at Cornell University, June 4, 5, 6, 1970)

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The role of the opening speaker is to explain the purpose of the Conference as seen by the organizers, and to make suggestions as to how to proceed with these aims. The Conference is the brainchild of Bill Osby, and in the discussions within Cornell the major purpose is to increase the number of Black graduate students in the universities of the Nation.

Perhaps I can serve a role by pointing out the barriers that I believe obstruct this overall purpose, and others who are here will undoubtedly add additional ones. We must identify the difficulties and collectively solve them.

We can only consider our aims to have been accomplished when the number of Black graduate students reaches a statistical number expected from population.

The first impediment is the loss of overall graduate student support which will be sharply felt beginning in the Fall of 1971. The Nixon Program for higher Education is being presented as an equal opportunity plan. It may well be such at the undergraduate level and I cannot comment on the program's effectiveness at the college level. However, at the graduate level, I foresee real problems and I, personally, believe that the Administration's Program may actually discriminate against students from poor families who aspire to graduate school. There are two basic reasons for my conclusion. First, the plan places a heavy emphasis on loan programs, and since those from lower income families will have accumulated a large debt from their undergraduate education, they will be reluctant to add to the debt by undertaking further financial responsibilities for graduate education. Second, and it is perhaps a psychological point, those from poorer families both by tradition and their obligations to others in their families will be less willing

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to assume large financial burdens. Loans of $2,500 per year will appear awesome to one who considers $25.00 a lot of money.

I do not believe that either the Federal or State Governments have faced the problem of the education of the poor at the graduate level. There is no doubt that the political problems are difficult, but they are no more difficult than the social problems facing the country.

The second approach that must be made is to increase the number of Black undergraduates that apply to graduate school. Of course we can go one step deeper and try to increase the number of college graduates, but this approach will take a long time, longer than we can wait.

The best available estimates indicate that there are about 425,000 Black students in higher education. (The number of 425,000 Black undergraduates represents an increase of 150% since 1964 as compared to an overall growth of 46%.) My own guess is that there will be roughly 50,000 Black students receiving baccalaureates in 1969-1970 or about 6 to 7 per cent of the total undergraduate degrees. These numbers should sharply increase over the next few years because there are probably many more Black freshmen than seniors.

But what happens to these 50,000 college graduates? A graduate dean might ask where are they? A survey of Black applicants for Fall, 1970, at eleven of the major graduate schools, showed that they had received a total of only 1,700 applications from identifiable Black applicants. Since these eleven institutions handle over 100,000 applications, the percentage of known Black applicants is unexpectedly low. These numbers must be increased and this must be accomplished without one institution attracting students from other graduate schools. It should be noted that in a 1968 ACE survey of freshmen, the Black students registered a higher aspiration for graduate study (55%) than the non-Black students (42%). However, a survey of 6,900 graduates of Black colleges

by G. J. Scott of College Placement showed that only 12% went directly to graduate study.

Undoubtedly a high number of Black college graduates are siphoned off into industrial and business careers at graduation. Each individual must be allowed to make his own choice but placement officers, particularly in the Black colleges, should inform their students of the opportunities available for graduate study.

Another barrier is the fact that Black applicants tend to concentrate in a small number of fields. At Cornell; Business, Education, Sociology, History, and City Planning account for almost one-half of the Black applicants, and 60% of the fields did not receive a single one. Students as well as placement officers overlook many areas of study. At Cornell, areas such as Development Sociology, Consumer Economics, Agricultural Economics, Industrial and Labor Relations, Human Development are essentially overlooked. Efforts must be made to inform prospective applicants of the large number of fields with excellent opportunities that exist in a large university.

Engineering areas have the greatest shortage of Black applicants. The previously mentioned study shows that of the eight graduate schools that reported data on engineering, there were only a total of 20 applicants. This small number is understandable when one considers that engineers without graduate training can enter industrial positions with a reasonable expectation of future financial and scientific status. Undoubtedly another factor is the aggressive industrial recruiting programs for Black engineers.

Given the relatively small number of applicants, and assuming that the need for more Black graduate students is critical, the criteria used for admissions must be examined. How valid are the predictors of graduate success? I believe that the validity of the usual predictors varies widely across areas of study. In the hard sciences which require a structured series of courses, the student's

undergraduate grade record and quantitative aptitude are probably useful predictors, although far from infallible.

Outside of the sciences, I believe that we just do not know how to evaluate applicants with much efficiency.

There are two pieces of evidence at Cornell that place the use of conventional predictors in an uncertain light. Foreign applicants who have records that are difficult to evaluate, and who have problems of cultural change and language uncertainties, have a lower attrition than non-foreign students. Second, a study of students who enter and pay their own tuition shows that they have a lower attrition than our NDEA fellows. And, of course, those students who are not offered financial aid have poorer academic credentials than those that do.

I would guess that motivation plays an extremely important role and there is no better test of motivation than paying out $2,300 to the treasurer.

We will never know the validity of our conventional predictors until students are admitted who would not ordinarily qualify. It should be noted in passing, as John Gardener points out in his book, "Excellence." that tests and credentials were initiated to change the patterns of higher education. Previous to the introduction of these procedures, students were frequently admitted on the basis of their social status and background. One can imagine a professor in those days resenting the idea that a student should be admitted to college merely because he was intelligent.

I would like to make one last point. National fellowship programs that award financial aid to Black students miss the point. They do not increase the number of Black students since these students would be admitted with aid almost anywhere they applied. All that it does is free institutional funds for marginal non-Black students.

I have pointed out some of the barriers, as I see them, to increasing the numbers of Black graduate students. I hope that over the next three days the participants in this Conference will find ways to overcome or at least lower the height of some of these barriers.